

Amendments to the Claims:

1-11. Cancelled.

12. (Previously Presented) A method for a data center to process usage data of a value dispensing device comprising:

receiving a first audit record from the value dispensing device, the first audit record generated by the value dispensing device at a start of an audit period, the first audit record including a value of at least one register maintained by the value dispensing device at the start of the audit period and a first digital signature;

receiving a second audit record from the value dispensing device, the second audit record generated by the value dispensing device at an end of the audit period, the second audit record including a value of the at least one register maintained by the value dispensing device at the end of the audit period and a second digital signature;

receiving usage data from the value dispensing device for the audit period;

verifying the first and second digital signatures;

if the first and second digital signatures verify, determining a difference between the value of the at least one register at the end of the audit period and the start of the audit period;

comparing the determined difference with corresponding data provided in the usage data; and

if the determined difference correlates with the corresponding data provided in the usage data, generating a usage report for the value dispensing system based on the usage data.

13. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein the first and second audit records each include a respective time stamp, and the method further comprises:

verifying the time stamp in the first audit record corresponds to the start of the audit period; and

verifying the time stamp in the second audit record corresponds to the end of the audit period.

14. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 13, ~~wherein if one of the time stamp in the first audit record or the second audit record does not correspond, the method further comprising~~ comprises:

indicating an error in the processing of the usage data when one of the time stamp in the first audit record or the second audit record does not correspond.

15. (Original) The method of claim 13, wherein the time stamp includes a date and a time.

16-17. Cancelled.

18. (Original) The method according to claim 12, wherein the first audit record is received before the end of the audit period.

19. (Original) The method of claim 18, further comprising:

storing the first audit record; and

retrieving the stored first audit record when the second audit record is received.

20. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes a plurality of register values.

21. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes an ascending register value.

22. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes a total piece count register value.

23. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein the first and second digital signatures are verified utilizing a public key.

24. (Original) The method of claim 12, wherein one of the first and second digital signatures does not verify, the method further comprises:

indicating an error in the processing of the usage data.

25. (Currently Amended) A data center to process usage data of a value dispensing device comprising:

~~an interface circuit means for receiving to receive~~ a first audit record, a second audit record and usage data from the ~~a~~ value dispensing device, the first audit record generated by the value dispensing device at a start of an audit period, the first audit record including a value of at least one register maintained by the value dispensing device at the start of the audit period and a first digital signature, the second audit record generated by the value dispensing device at an end of the audit period, the second audit record including a value of the at least one register at the end of the audit period and a second digital signature; and

means for processing the first audit record, said audit record and usage data coupled to interface circuit, the processing including verifying the first and second digital signatures;

~~means for~~ determining a difference between the value of the at least one register at the end of the audit period and the start of the audit period if the first and second digital signatures verify;

~~means for~~ comparing the determined difference with corresponding data provide in the usage data; and

~~means for~~ generating a usage report for the value dispensing device based on the usage data if the determined difference correlates with the corresponding data provided in the usage data.

26. (Currently Amended) The data center of claim 25, wherein the first and second audit records each include a respective time stamp, and the processing data center further includes comprises:

~~means for~~ verifying the time stamp in the first audit record corresponds to the start of the audit period; and

~~means for~~ verifying the time stamp in the second audit record corresponds to the end of the audit period.

27. (Currently Amended) The data center of claim 26, wherein the processing further includes comprising:

~~means for~~ indicating an error in the processing of the usage data if one of the time stamp in the first audit record or the second audit record does not correspond.

28. Cancelled.

29. (Currently Amended) The data center method of claim 25, wherein the first audit record is received before the end of the audit period, and the data center further comprises:

~~means for~~ a memory for storing the first audit record; and

the processing further includes ~~means for~~ retrieving the stored first audit record when the second audit record is received.

30. (Original) The data center of claim 25, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes an ascending register value.

31. (Original) The data center of claim 25, wherein the at least one register value in the first and second audit records includes a total piece count register value.

32. (Original) The data center of claim 25, wherein the first and second digital signatures are verified utilizing a public key.

33-41. Canceled.

42. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 12, wherein the value dispensing device is a postage meter.

43. (Previously Presented) The data center of claim 25, wherein the value dispensing device is a postage meter.